

Thompson lives in this 120-foot structure

"The real beauty of wood is having an understanding that it's been given to us," says woodworker and children's book author David Thompson.

Woodwork? It's kid's stuff, says author of book on same

By LAURIE SLOTHOWER
Sentinel Staff Writer

IF I HAD A HAMMER, I'd hammer in the morning. But mostly I'd hammer my thumb. Woodworking is not something my generation learned in school, particularly if you were of the female persuasion. Upon entering junior high school we girls were dutifully shunted off to beginning cooking class to fathom the mysteries of lump-free gravy while the boys took classes in industrial shop. To this day I can barely hammer a nail in a wall to hang a picture without sending plaster flying. But I can make blanc mange.

David Thompson would change all that. Children — even preschoolers — not only can learn woodworking, but they should, Thompson believes.

The parttime Santa Cruz resident has written a book, **EASY WOODSTUFFS FOR KIDS** (Gryphon House, Inc. Mount Rainer, Md. \$8.95) which outlines the basics of sawing, gluing and shaping wood.

The book, which has sold in the "tens of thousands of copies," according to Thompson, has received favorable reviews from the American Library Association.

"It's not so much an 'easy' book as an elementary one," the 40-year-old woodworker and teacher said.

The book starts with instructions on safety and continues through a series of projects of increasing complexity.

These include making a simple broom holder ("it works, too," Thompson exclaims) and religious symbols using wood scrapes.

Thompson would put hammers in the

Harding of Santa Cruz, provided information for the book and modeled for some of its pen and ink drawings.

A globe-trotting teacher whose speech is flavored with South Pacific slang, Thompson has taught at public schools across the United States and in the South Pacific, including a stint in Colombia as a Peace Corp volunteer.

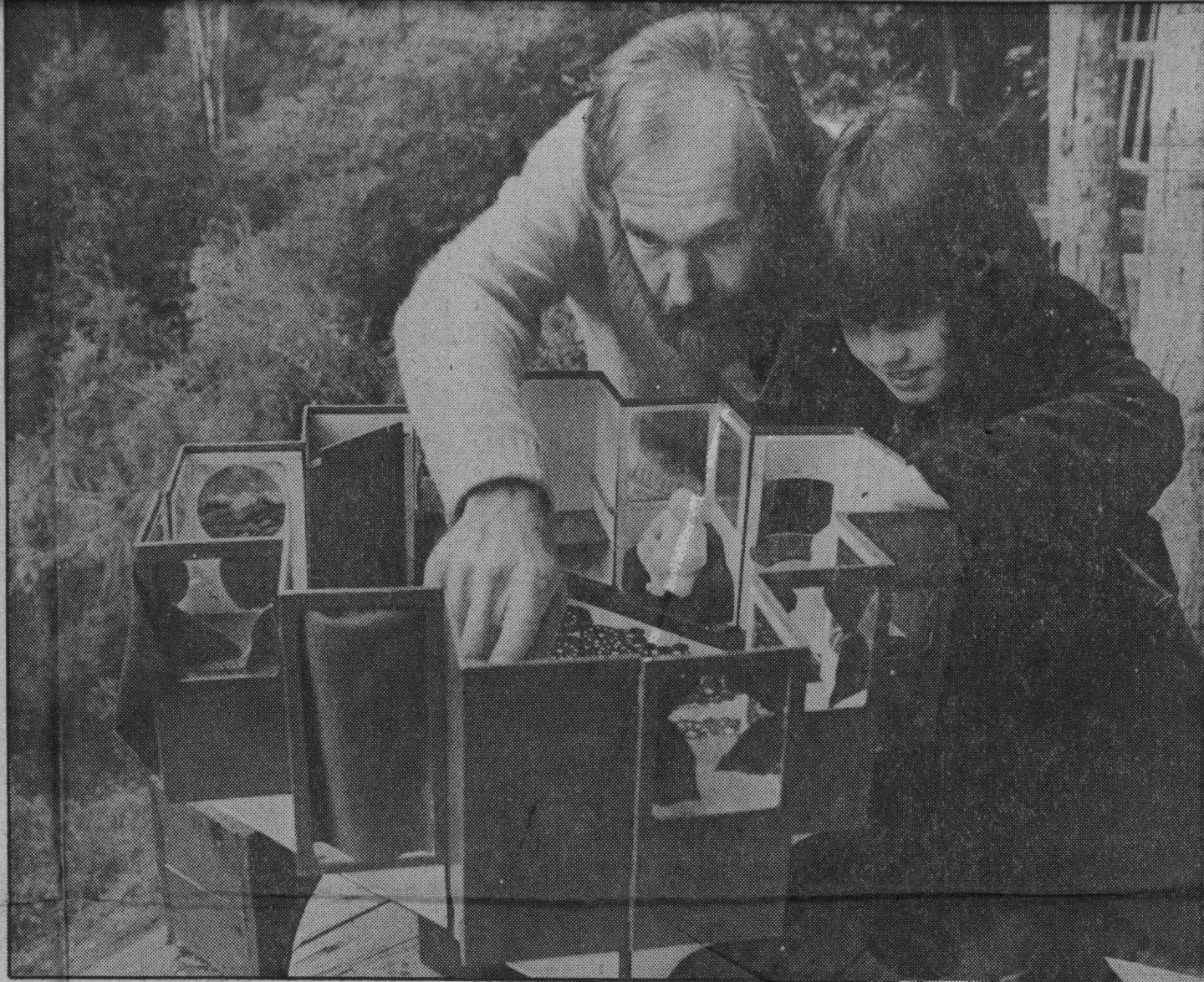
He worked for the federal government as an educational consultant for the underprivileged from 1966-69, "but when Nixon came in, a lot of the spirit of those kind of programs went away. And so did I."

He ended up in Bolinas where he apprenticed himself to a woodworker named, ironically, Arthur Carpenter.

The book came about after Thompson mentioned the idea to a publisher-friend of his. A few months later he got an advance check and a book contract in the mail. "I was broke so I cashed the check and spent the next year writing the book."

Thompson is a fount of trivia about wood. The Chinese, for example, list wood along with fire, with earth and air as the fundamental elements of the world. "The real beauty of wood is having an understanding that it's been given to us," offers Thompson.

His next book project is **OLDER HANDS, YOUNGER HANDS**, in which Thompson will outline the basic steps of five crafts: baking and cooking, sewing and weaving, pottery,



David Thompson decorate a doll house built by Ariel Harding, above, and her brother Sita. Dan Coyro/Sentinel

woodworking and gardening. Adlt and children's hands will illustrate the text.

Thompson's interest in wood and his philanthropic bent evolved into his most futuristic projects, portable, lightweight wooden houses you can build and assemble in one day.

These structures consist of identical pieces of wood that are bolted together to make as large a house as one would like, sort of like Lego building blocks for adults.

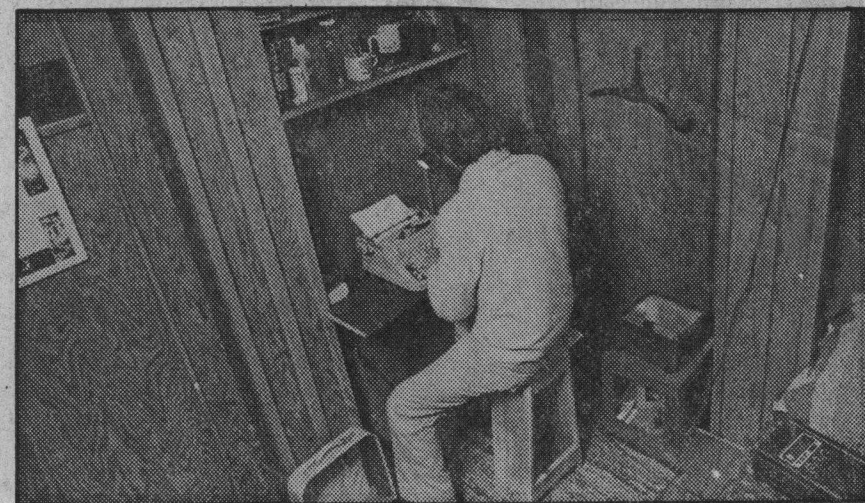
Thompson lives in a 10 by 12 foot, two-story house in Ben Lomond.

To conserve space, the cabinets are built into the walls. The bed similarly olds up into the wall. The ceiling can used as a storage area, and power is from a 12 volt battery.

Thompson considers the house his experiment in minimalist living. "I want to see if I can artfully live in a structre like this," he says, crouched in the upper level of the house. "I want to know the limits of smallness."

He designed the house using nothing but a saw and a rout a tool which carves edges in wood. It cost \$1,00, and the pieces can be stacked in the back of a pickup truck and and moved.

Besides its comparative mobility, the structure needs only a plot of land to rest on — no 20-year mortgages.



Building cabinets inside the wall helps conserve space

The economic advantages are obvious, says Thompson. A woodworker friend of his had rented a shop for \$1,000 a month. The woodworker built a structure similar to Thompson's, but bigger, and put a woodshop in the bottom level. His rent now is \$100 a month.

If it all sounds a little outlandish, Thompson points out that Victorian houses in San Francisco are little more than pre-fabricated boxes

whose parts were shipped from the East Coast to San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake.

"Housing is one of the crucial issues facing underdeveloped countries today," says Thompson. "This way we can house everybody without cutting down all the forests."

And still have enough wood left over to make a few tool boxes, as well.

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The man who would put hammers in the hands of babes says teaching woodworking to children is little different than teaching adults. A few exceptions:

Children move quickly and must be reminded to S-L-O-W D-O-W-N.

Tools must be scaled accordingly. The average hammer is 16 ounces — too heavy for a child. Thompson recommends one weighing between eight and 10 ounces, with a handle a child can get his or her hand around.

The rest is a matter of seeing through the eyes of a beginner. Activities an adult may take for granted, like pounding a nail into a board correctly, must be explained. (The wrist should be used as the main force in hammering, not the elbow or the arm, Thompson points out. The more relaxed the arm, the easier it will be to hammer accurately.)

To keep the fingers away from the hammer when using small nails, he suggests using a piece of light cardboard, pressing the nail through it. Otherwise, the fingers are too close to the nail. "Since I learned this, I have not once hit my fingers," Thompson writes.

He offers a song for children to sing while sanding the wood, to the tune of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat:" "Sand, sand, sand your wood, looking at the grain. When you think your work is done it's time to start again."

Woodworking, Thompson believes, is an important subject for children. "The question I had was: how do you introduce this subject to really young kids?"

A longtime public school teacher who considers himself an educational philosopher, Thompson uses a system of breaking down lessons into elements and numbers.

The elements are the ingredients, or the parts, of a project. In woodworking this would be sticks or boards. In cooking, flour or shortening.

The numbers are how much of each are needed.

To teach children, one starts out with the fewest elements and works progressively.

In woodworking, for example, children start out by breaking up sticks into equal-sized pieces.

The last project in the book is a tool box which requires sawing, sanding, gluing and hammering.

Thompson's godchildren, Sita and Ariel

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